

Cham is the principal and most spoken language among the Chamic languages, which are spoken in parts of mainland Southeast Asia, North Sumatra and on the island of Hainan. Cham is notable for being the oldest-attested Austronesian language, with the Dong Yen Chau inscription being verifiably dated to the late 4th century AD.

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## Phonology

Western Cham language has 21 consonants and 9 vowels.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Consonants

		<u>Labial</u>	<u>Alveolar</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Plosive</u>	<u>voiceless unaspirated</u>	<u>p</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>c</u>	<u>k</u>	<u>ʔ</u>
	<u>voiceless aspirated</u>	<u>p<sup>h</sup></u>	<u>t<sup>h</sup></u>	<u>c<sup>h</sup></u>	<u>k<sup>h</sup></u>	
<u>Implosive</u>		<u>ɓ</u>	<u>ɗ</u>			
<u>Nasal</u>		<u>m</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>ɲ</u>	<u>ŋ</u>	
<u>Liquid</u>			<u>l</u>			
<u>Fricative</u>			<u>s</u>			<u>h</u>
<u>Rhotic</u>					<u>ɣ</u>	
<u>Approximant</u>				<u>j</u>	<u>w</u>	

## Vowels

### Monophthongs

	<u>Front</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Back</u>
<u>High</u>	<u>i</u>	<u>ɨ</u>	<u>u</u>
<u>Mid (Tense)</u>	<u>e</u>	<u>ə</u>	<u>o</u>
<u>Mid (Lax)</u>	<u>ɛ</u>		<u>ɔ</u>
<u>Low</u>		<u>a</u>	

### Diphthongs

ia, iu (occurs only before -ʔ), ea, ua, oa, au (occurs only before -ʔ),

iə, ɛə, ɔə, uə.

## Grammar

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### Word formation

There are several prefixes and infixes which can be used for word derivation.<sup>[5]</sup>

- prefix *pa-*: causative, sometimes giving more force to the word
  - *thău* (to know) → *pathău* (to inform)
  - *blěi* (to buy) → *pablěi* (to sell)
  - *bier* (low) → *pabier* (to lower)

- *yău* (like, as) → *payău* (to compare)
- *jœû* (finished) → *pajœû* (well finished)
- prefix *mœ-*: sometimes causative, often indicates a state, possession, mutuality, reciprocity
  - *jruu* (poison) → *mœjruu* (to poison)
  - *gruu* (teacher) → *mœgruu* (to study)
  - *téan* (belly) → *mœtéan* (pregnancy)
  - *boḥ* (egg, fruit) → *mœboḥ* (lay an egg, give fruit)
  - *daké* (horn) → *mœdaké* (having horns)
- prefix *ta-* or *da-*: frequentative
  - *galuṅ* (to roll) → *tagaluṅ* (to roll around)
  - *dâp* (to hide oneself) → *dadâp* (to be wont to hide oneself)
- infix *-an-*: noun formation
  - *pvâch* (to speak) → *panvâch* (speech)
  - *tiêu* (row) → *taniêu* (oar)
  - *dok* (to live) → *danok* (house, living place)
- infix *-mœ-*: no specific meaning
  - *payău* (to compare) → *pamœyău* (to compare)

Reduplication is often used:<sup>[5]</sup>

- *palěi*, *pala-palěi* (country)
- *raḃaḥ*, *raḃaḥ-raḃœp* (misery)

## Syntax and word order

Cham generally uses SVO word order, without any case marking to distinguish subject from object:<sup>[6]</sup>

*Dahlak atong nhu.*

I beat he

I beat him.

*Nhu atong dahlak.*

he beat I

He beats me.

Dummy pronominal subjects are sometimes used, echoing the subject:

*Inœû hudiêp dahlak **nhu** atong aděi puthang nhu.*

my wife's mother **she** beat her husband's younger sister

"My wife's mother beats her husband's younger sister."

Composite verbs will behave as one inseparable verb, having the object come after it:

*Bloḥ nhu ḍiḥ dii apvěi*

then she lie at fire (i.e.: give birth) son

*aněk lakěi.*

"Then she gave birth to a son."

Sometimes, however, the verb is placed in front of the subject:

*Lêk dahlak.*

fall I

"I fall."

Auxiliary verbs are placed after any objects:

*Nhu ba hudiêp nhu nau.*

he bring his wife go

"He brings his wife."

If a sentence contains more than one main verb, one of the two will have an adverbial meaning:

*Nhu dâp klaḥ mœtai.*

he hide evade death

"He evaded death by hiding."

Adjectives come after the nouns they modify:<sup>[7]</sup>

*thang prong*

house big

"a big house"

If the order is reversed, the whole will behave like a compound:

*ôrang prong shap*

person big noise

"a noisy person"

Composite sentences can be formed with the particle *krung*:<sup>[8]</sup>

*thaa drěi athău thaa  
drěi mœyău*

the dog and the cat

"the dog and the cat his brother gave him"

**krung**

*ăi nhu  
brěi kaa  
nhu*

**which**

his brother  
gave him

*nau tapak danau krung ăi that ikan*

to go  
straight

lake

**which**

brother is  
fishing

"to go straight to the lake where his  
brother was fishing"

It is also possible to leave out this particle, without change in meaning:<sup>[6]</sup>

<i>Dahlak brěi athêh nan</i>	<i>kaa va dahlak</i>	<i>Ø</i>	<i>dok dii palěi Ram.</i>
I give this horse	to my uncle	<b>who</b>	live in the village of Ram

"I have given this horse to my uncle, who lives in the village of Ram."

Questions are formed with the sentence-final particle *rěi*.<sup>[9]</sup>

*Aněk thău vakhar rěi?*  
 child know writing q  
 "Can you write, child?"

Other question words are in situ:

*Hěu nau hatau?*  
 you go **where**  
 "Where are you going?"

## Nominals

Like many languages in Eastern Asia, Cham uses numeral classifiers to express amounts.<sup>[10]</sup> The classifier will always come after the numeral, with the noun coming invariably before or after the classifier-numeral pair.

<i>limœu boḥ chœk</i>	<i>palěi naṃ boḥ</i>
five CLF mountain	village six CLF
"five mountains"	"six villages"

The above examples show the classifier *boḥ*, which literally means "egg" and is the most frequently used — particularly for round and voluminous objects. Other classifiers are *ôrang* (person) for people and deities, *bêk* for long objects, *blaḥ* (leaf) for flat objects, and many others.

The days of the month are counted with a similar system, with two classifiers: one (*bangun*) used to count days before the full moon, and the other one (*ranaṃ*) for days after the full moon.<sup>[11]</sup>

<i>harěi thaa bangun</i>	<i>harěi dvaa klaṃ</i>
day one CLF	day two CLF
"first day after new moon"	"second day after full moon"

Personal pronouns behave like ordinary nouns and do not show any case distinctions. There are different forms depending on the level of politeness. The first person singular, for example, is *kău* in formal or distant context, while it is *dahlak* (in Vietnam) or *hulun* (in Cambodia) in an ordinarily polite context. As is the case with many other languages of the region, kinship terms are often used as personal pronouns.<sup>[8]</sup>

Comparative and superlative are expressed with the locative preposition *di/dii*.<sup>[12]</sup>

*tapaa di ai nhu*  
big at his brother  
"bigger than his brother"

## Verbs

There are some particles that can be used to indicate tense/aspect.<sup>[13]</sup> The future is indicated with *shi* or *thi* in Vietnam, with *hi* or *si* in Cambodia. The perfect is expressed with *jæû*. The first one comes in front of the verb:

*Arak ni kău shi nao.*  
now I FUT go  
"I will go now."

The second one is sentence-final:

*Shit tra kău nao jæû.*  
little more I go PRF  
"I'll be gone in a moment."

Certain verbs can function as auxiliaries to express other tenses or aspects.<sup>[14]</sup> The verb *dok* ("to stay") is used for the continuous, *væk* ("to return") for the repetitive aspect, and *kiæng* ("to want") for the future tense.

The negation is formed with *ôh/ô* at either or both sides of the verb, or with *di/dii*<sup>[15]</sup> in front.<sup>[13]</sup>

The imperative is formed with the sentence-final particle *bêk*, and the negative imperative with the preverbal *javai/jvêi* (in Vietnam and Cambodia respectively).<sup>[13]</sup>

## Sociolinguistics

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### Diglossia

Brunelle observed two phenomena of language use among speakers of Eastern Cham: They are both diglossic and bilingual (in Cham and Vietnamese). Diglossia is the situation where two varieties of a language are used in a single language community, and oftentimes one is used on formal occasions (labelled **H**) and the other is more colloquial (labelled **L**).<sup>[16][17]</sup>

### Dialectal differences

Cham is divided into two primary dialects. Western Cham is spoken by the Cham in Cambodia as well as in the adjacent Vietnamese provinces of An Giang and Tây Ninh. Eastern Cham is spoken by the coastal Cham populations in the Vietnamese provinces of Bình Thuận, Ninh Thuận, and Đông Nai. The two regions where Cham is spoken are separated both geographically and culturally. The more numerous Western Cham are predominantly Muslims (although some in Cambodia now practice Theravāda Buddhism), while the Eastern Cham practice both Islam and Hinduism. Ethnologue states that the Eastern and Western dialects are no longer mutually intelligible. The table below gives some examples of words where the two dialects differed as of the 19th century.<sup>[18]</sup>

	Cambodia	southern Vietnam
<b>vowels</b>		
child	<i>anœk</i>	<i>an êk</i>
take	<i>tuk</i>	<i>tôk</i>
not	<i>jvêi</i>	<i>jvai</i>
<b>sibilants</b>		
one	<i>sa</i>	<i>tha</i>
save from drowning	<i>srong</i>	<i>throng</i>
salt	<i>sara</i>	<i>shara</i>
equal	<i>samu</i>	<i>hamu</i>
<b>final consonants</b>		
heavy	<i>trap</i>	<i>trak</i>
in front	<i>anap</i>	<i>anak</i>
<b>lexical differences</b>		
market	<i>pasa</i>	<i>darak</i>
hate	<i>amoh</i>	<i>limuk</i>

Lê et al. (2014:175)<sup>[19]</sup> lists a few Cham subgroups.

- **Chăm Poông**: in Thạnh Hiếu village, Phan Hiệp commune, Bắc Bình District, Bình Thuận Province. The Chăm Poông practice burial instead of cremation as the surrounding Cham do.
- **Chăm Hroi** (population 4,000): in Phước Vân District (Bình Định Province), Đông Xuân District (Phú Yên Province), and Tây Sơn District (Bình Định Province)
- **Chàvà Ku**, a mixed Malay-Khmer people in Châu Đốc

## Writing Systems

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Cham script is a Brahmic script.<sup>[2]</sup> The script has two varieties: *Akhar Thrah* (Eastern Cham) and *Akhar Srak* (Western Cham). The Western Cham language is written with the Arabic script or the aforementioned Akhar Srak.<sup>[20][21]</sup>

## Dictionaries

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The Ming dynasty Chinese Bureau of Translators produced a Chinese-Cham dictionary.

John Crawford's 1822 work "Malay of Champa" contains a dictionary of the Cham language.

## See also

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- Cham script
- Cham people
- Cham calendar
- Champa kingdom

## Notes

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1. Western Cham (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/cja/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015) Eastern Cham (<https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/cjm/>) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
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5. Aymonier 1889, chapt. X
6. Aymonier 1889, chapt. XXI
7. Aymonier 1889, chapt. XIII
8. Aymonier 1889, chapt. XII
9. Aymonier 1889, chapt. XIX
10. Aymonier 1889, chapt. XI
11. Aymonier 1889, chapt. VIII
12. Aymonier 1889, chapt. XVI
13. Aymonier 1889, chapt. XV
14. Aymonier 1889, chapt. XIV
15. This happens to be homophonous with the locative preposition.
16. Brunelle, Marc (2008). "Diglossia, Bilingualism, and the Revitalization of Written Eastern Cham". *Language Documentation & Conservation*. **2** (1): 28–46. [hdl:10125/1848](https://hdl.handle.net/10125%2F1848) (<https://hdl.handle.net/10125%2F1848>).
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20. Hosken, Martin (2019), *L2/19-217 Proposal to encode Western Cham in the UCS* (<https://www.unicode.org/L2/L2019/19217-western-cham.pdf>) (PDF)
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## Further reading

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## External links

- Kaipuleohone has an archive including written materials of Cham

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